



**164th Meeting of the
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**
October 21 – 22, 2015
H. Rex Lee Auditorium, Utulei Village

Community Activities & Issues Report

Fisheries Development

The American Samoa Department of Commerce is facilitating the application for the Department of Treasury's Small State Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) award. The department's Fisheries Development staff has indicated that the SSBCI will be used for the funding of super alia fishing vessels. Representatives from the Department of Commerce have indicated that up to 10 awards for super alias may be administered. The super alia vessel would allow for longer fishing trips, with increased catch capability, and greater safety. There have been questions about the market infrastructure and accompanying training and business development needs for the successful of super alia project implementation raised at Advisory Panel meetings. Fishermen have raised concerns that the market may not be ready to support the increased amount of fish from these super alia currently, and that market development and exportation for bottomfish need to be explored to support a super alia fleet in American Samoa. Another concern brought up by fishermen was the need for training and certification support for fishermen who are awarded funding for a super alia (estimated at about \$200,000.00) to ensure that they have a proper business plan in place and can efficiently operate a vessel of that size in order to be profitable and have a viable business.

Fagatogo Fish Market

Back in January, the Fagatogo Fish Market was opened during a dedication ceremony by the Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources, the Department of Commerce and the Council. The fish market was a joint project by the Council and the American Samoa Government to develop a hub for local fishermen to set up a centrally located market for the sale of fresh seafood, and to develop a fishermen's cooperative for the sharing of costs and the development of a local market for the public to find daily fresh fish with set market prices on various reef, bottomfish and pelagic fish.

Without a cooperative for the fishermen put in place in time for the market's opening, the government opted to have the fish market leased to a private fisherman to run as a business.

During the January dedication and grand opening, the market was opened as Lei & Bros. Fish Market. The owner has struggled during the nearly ten months of his lease to meet the cost of operation and agree upon buying costs with local fishermen. The market has been primarily stocked with catch from his own boat. He also cited the lack of enforcement against unauthorized roadside vendors as competition with the fish market. Earlier this month, the Department of Commerce has indicated that the business has ended its lease with the American Samoa Government, citing the high costs associated with operating the business and the hardships in receiving locally caught fresh fish for the market. The American Samoa Department of Commerce is currently working on a plan to revitalize and re-open the Fagatogo Fish Market. This plan is currently being developed by the department's Fishery Development staff, and will look to improve the use of the market's facilities, which include display cases for value added products, a walk in refrigerator and freezer, a table saw for large fish, and the installation of counter space, an industrial sink with a wash down hose, and a large prep area.

Disaster Relief Fund Project

The American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources (DMWR) is in the process of carrying out its project to utilize the nearly \$1M awarded to American Samoa. The department has already compensated alia owners who suffered damages to their alia vessels during the September 2009 tsunami. One of the major tasks being undertaken by the department staff is preparing for the release of requests for proposals on the projects named under the disaster relief fund. The DMWR's staff is working closely with the American Samoa Office of Procurement to develop these RFPs for the construction of a training facility and the construction of a new boat ramp in the village of Malaloa near the Fagatogo Marina.

For the design of the new boat ramp in Malaloa village, DMWR is working with the local Department of Public Works Building and Civil Engineering divisions. The ramps must be tailored for the shoreline of the selected Malaloa village area, and have the functionality to accommodate both small boats and larger alia and charter fishing boats. Required for the construction of the boat ramp and training facilities listed under the disaster relief project, DMWR will need to obtain permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers as well. The Department's staff is in contact with the NOAA PIRO office in Honolulu to get the required permits and to prepare the necessary environmental assessments required by both the Army Corps and the local Department of Commerce's Project Notification & Review System for land use permit approval.

Fisheries Issues in American Samoa

Since the 163rd meeting of the Council in June, the major fisheries issues in American Samoa have been the proposed amendment of the Large Vessel Prohibited Area (LVPA) and the proposed amendment by Tri Marine International for American Samoa to be considered a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) and for an exemption for US flagged purse seine vessels that deliver more than 50% of their catch to Starkist and Tri Marine processors in American Samoa from the closure of the Effort Limit Area for Purse Seine (ELAPS) for 2015 on the high seas.

There has been a split in opinion on the LVPA amendment, and comments submitted on the federal regulations website show that there are a number people on both sides who feel strongly about the proposal. The comment period issued by the NOAA National Marine Fisheries for the public to give comments on the proposed amendment closed on September 24th. The Governor and Fono both drafted documents opposing the measure, although points in their comments have been disputed by others – particularly the assumption that the amendment will present gear and vessel conflicts, and endanger the reefs and bottomfish and other species on the southern banks.

The Tri Marine's petition, unlike the LVPA proposed amendment, has been met with resounding support from all stakeholders in American Samoa. The American Samoa Fono (Legislature) supported the petition submitted by Tri Marine International in the form of a joint resolution, passed by the House and Senate. The Fono's support was mirrored by the Governor of American Samoa, Congresswoman Aumua Amata Radewagen, and the Department of Interior's Office of Insular (OIA) in supporting the petition. In addition to these leaders' support, there is also overwhelming support from the Directors of American Samoa Government, businesses of the Territory, owners and operators of local fishing vessels, and all three major boat-based fishing associations – the Pago Pago Game Fish Association (PPGFA), Tautai O Samoa Association (longline members), and the Pago Alia Fishing Association (PAFA).